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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LUANDA 000693

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STATE FOR DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION - CONNIE HUNTER
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TAGS: [EAIR](#) [ECON](#) [AO](#)

SUBJECT: EU BLACKLISTS TAAG ANGOLAN AIRLINES

REF: A. LUANDA 631

[1](#)B. LUANDA 675

Classified By: CDA Francisco Fernandez for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The EU has included TAAG (Angolan National Airlines) on its black list as of July 6. Angola flirted with banning all EU flights to Angola in retaliation, but strong words of advice from the Ambassador and other foreign diplomats convinced the GRA to act sensibly to confront the issue and improve aviation safety rather than attempt to assuage national pride. Media reaction in the government press was strongly nationalistic, focusing on TAAG's modern fleet of newly-purchased Boeing airplanes, rather than its inability to meet ICAO aviation standards. However the independent press was highly critical of the Ministry's leadership in tackling the problems and guaranteeing aviation safety. The announcement of the ban came on June 28, 2007, the same day a TAAG domestic airplane crashed in the northern city of Mbanza Congo killing six passengers and seriously wounding another thirty-eight of the total 78 passengers. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) On Thursday, June 28, the European Union announced that it would include TAAG - Angolan National Airlines in its black list effective July 6, 2007. Details were not released regarding the specific reasons for inclusion in the black list, however reports focused on out-of-date flight manuals. During the May visit of the Transportation Security Agency's Representative to Luanda (reftel), he noted no net change in civil aviation improvements and advised the Angolans of the urgent need for Angola to move forward on aviation security if it wished to remain in the Safe Skies program.

Transport Minister Seeks and Heeds US Advice

[1](#)3. (C) Minister of Transportation Luis Brandao requested a meeting with then Ambassador Efird on July 3 to discuss the issue. Vice Minister for Aviation (and former head of ENANA), Helder Preza and Director of Aviation Security (INAVIC) Pombal were also present; DCM and P/E Chief accompanied the Ambassador. Brandao started off with the explanation that the EU was punishing Angola for having purchased Boeing airplanes instead of Airbus. Brandao and Preza characterized the European inspections of TAAG planes as nit-picking, and were not willing to admit their validity. He mentioned the GRA was considering retaliatory action but he assured us that the Luanda-Houston petroleum industry charter & Houston Express,8 would not be effected, going so far as to ask whether it could increase the number of flights per week if the GRA implemented a ban against the European airlines.

14. (C) Ambassador Efird downplayed the Minister,s logic, noting that many other countries had purchased Boeing planes and had not suffered EU retaliation. She told him that rather than deny offenses, Angola should start any public response by iterating the importance of aviation security to the GRA. Further she advised the Minister to work with Boeing or one of the European carriers to improve TAAG and the GRA,s safety record in order to get off the banned list as soon as possible. She advised the GRA not to cut itself economically and &shoot itself in the foot8 by banning EU airlines. Referring to the previous US TSA visits (ref A) she reminded Minister Brandao that Angola needed to complete the process of establishing an independent airline regulatory authority with power to enforce safety measures. She also reaffirmed the USG interest in working with the GRA on safe skies encouraging it to take the next steps necessary in our ongoing consultations.

Goadng the EU

15. (C) The EU's resident Ambassador told the DCM at the July 4 reception that Angolan threats to ban European carriers greatly eroded possible support for the GRA on the issue. He added that the EU commissioners felt no great urgency to provide technical assistance to Angola under such circumstances. Apparently, at the June 28 and July 4 meetings in Brussels on the issue, TAAG representatives continued defiant and blamed the EU atttude on TAAG's purchase of Boeings and retaliation by the French. According to Luanda based EU staff, while the Angolans blamed the problem on the French authorities, ramp checks at all TAAG's European destinatio came up with the same problems. Although Brussels denied any connection to the EU ban, on July 6, EU President Durao Barroso cancelled his planned July

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13-14 visit to Luanda.

Public Opinion on the side of Aviation Safety

16. (U) The Angolan government-run press portrayed the ban as a European effort to show favoritism to European carriers and oppress an African national airline from succeeding by invoking unfair competition. The perception in Angola was that with the TAAG purchase of six new Boeing airplanes in November 2006 the airline has automatically complied with international regulations. However the independent press was highly critical of the Ministry of Transportation and TAAG officials urging the GRA to take seriously the charges laid against TAAG.

British Airways Dinged for the UK,s Efficiency

17. (C) The British Ambassador to Angola told us that the UK Department of Transportation on Friday June 29 informed the GRA that it was enforcing the EU ban prior to the July 4th EU vote. This caused the GRA to retaliate by revoking British Airway,s landing rights in Luanda, forcing the cancellation of the once weekly BA London-Luanda flight only hours before it was scheduled to depart on June 30. BA is still awaiting official permission to resume its flight although it has verbal assurances this will occur for the July 13-14 flight. Other EU carriers continue to operate on their regular schedules. For its near daily flights to Lisbon, TAAG has worked out an arrangement to ferry people as far as Sal, Cape Verde, from where Cape Verde Airlines carries the passengers to Lisbon.

TAAG Plane Crashes in Northern Angola

18. (SBU) In an unfortunate coincidence, the announcement of the EU blacklist came almost simultaneously with the news that a TAAG domestic aircraft had crashed on landing in the northern city of M,banza Congo, killing six and seriously wounding thirty-eight of the total 78 passengers. The only Amcit on the plane walked away with a bump on his knee. The

TAAG plane was a Boeing 737. Per ICAO regulations for airplane crashes involving US-manufactured craft, Embassy Luanda formally offered the assistance of the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) and Boeing to the GRA on June 29. Two Angolan civil aviation officials have traveled to Washington with the black boxes from the downed aircraft in order to investigate the causes of the crash. Witnesses on the scene believe the crash to have been caused by pilot error.

19. (C) Comment: Angola saw the EU ban as a direct blow to its national integrity and considered retaliation by banning EU flights as a matter of national honor, despite the devastating effect this would have had on the Angolan economy. The GRA,s frustration and wrath at the current situation is directed at the Europeans, in particular the French, as a number of the inspections were carried out at Charles de Gaulle airport. However, it is now - at least publicly - focused on the immediate steps it needs to take to improve its civil aviation oversight and standards. We believe this is an excellent opportunity for the USG to reinvigorate our support for capacity building with GRA civil aviation officials. Given the wake-up call the GRA is facing with the EU, and the President,s statements to Ambassador Efird (ref B) we believe the GRA will be forced and its civil aviation organization empowered to take some of the steps it has been dragging its feet on over the last year. USG technical assistance to the GRA and TAAG at this time could only strengthen our bilateral relationship.
FERNANDEZ